

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Email remains my preferred way of communicating even though sometimes I text or talk on the phone. But text messages sometimes seem too brief, and phone calls can become too long. With email I can usually think through what I want to say, communicate it, and get a response in a timely way. At least, I hope I get a response in a timely way. Sometimes I send out a carefully worded message, and I get no reply. And I'm sure sometimes people send me a carefully worded message and get no reply. Even when conversing in person, you wonder sometimes if your words are getting anywhere. Parents sometimes complain that their kids don't listen them; kids sometimes complain that their parents don't listen to them. At work, I have learned that just because I say something to someone else doesn't mean that my words are going to take any effect at all.

So today's first reading provides an astonishing view of God's power. The bible speaks of God's power in various ways: the creation of the world, the conquest of enemies, the resurrection of Jesus. But through Isaiah God explains another power. He says, "my word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it." This clearly separates God from humanity. We may at times get no one to do anything we say, but God's word accomplishes everything that it says.

Isaiah's message is even stronger than Jesus' parable of the sower. Some of the seed fell on fertile soil, but a lot of it did not. In some cases, nothing grew. But in Isaiah, God compares his word not to randomly scattered seed, but to rain and snow. "From the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and and fruitful." That's how God's word is. God wills something. God speaks something. The word achieves its end. It is as reliable as the properties of water.

Although none of us achieves the same success with our words, we have all used words that do take effect. Many parents are justifiably proud of their children. We have good friendships. We've accomplished visions at work. Sometimes our words too can be compared to the rain and the snow. In a grace-filled way, many of our words have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful.

So why doesn't this happen all the time? Why is it that when we say the right things to children, parents, employees, friends or politicians, we do not always get the right results? There are at least two possibilities. One is that the words we speak really are not God's word. In spite of our best discernment, we may not be saying exactly what God would want us to say. Or perhaps we said the right words, but the effect we are looking for is not correct. We are looking for certain results, but seeing something else. It could be that the end we are seeing is the one that God wanted all along to achieve. It is hard to say.

But this much is sure: God, who created this world sustains it and continues to call it into being. Through the prophets we believe that God has a plan of salvation, a plan that involves each of us. God uses us and uses our words to make that plan achieve its end. We cooperate best when we listen carefully for the word of God, when we speak it without changing it, and when we accept the results that God has in mind.